

Utah State Library Division
TIPS FOR DIRECTORS AND TRUSTES ON ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING

IDENTIFY stakeholders.

Who has a stake in your program, project, or service? Think beyond the obvious individuals and groups. Library patrons, for example, are not just patrons. They are parents, teachers, business executives, teens, doctors, lawyers, the unemployed, students... Find individuals or groups that represent your stakeholders and explain to them (they may not have thought about it) how the library benefits them and why they have a stake in its success. Then, ask for their support. Grass roots support is hard to build in an emergency.

INCLUDE as many stakeholders and elected officials as you can in your planning process, activities, programs, celebrations, etc.

Give those you need on your side a sense of ownership by making them a part of your planning process. If they can't sit on the board or a committee, ask them to review a draft, give advice, or sit on a discussion panel. Consult them. Keep an open door. Invite them to play with you as well as work by remembering them when you have an interesting activity or celebration they can attend. Attend their events. Think participation.

INFORM your stakeholders and elected officials about your needs, visions, plans, and achievements.

Learn how to write a press release, start a newsletter, create a flyer, give a speech, or write a letter. Sponsor an event and have an information table or booth. Draw up a list of opinion leaders and decision makers and put them on your mailing list. Look for all those informal opportunities to "tell your story." If you have bad news, tell that, too, instead of waiting for someone else to break it for you.

KNOW how decisions are made and power is practiced in your community.

Learn who makes what decisions and when. Look for their criteria. Understand the competing interests and priorities that struggle for their attention. By knowing how decisions are made and how the political process works, you can target and time your efforts better. Advocacy in the wrong place and at the wrong time is not effective. Be aware of voting blocks and alliances. Learn the protocol for writing letters to elected representatives, calling them on the phone, and making a personal visit.

PLAN your advocacy or lobbying effort.

First, understand what the difference is you are trying to make. Fix clear targets. Brainstorm with others on how to hit them. Decide what comes first and what comes next. Set a plan and coordinate with others. Make assignments and set deadlines. Check progress. Be prepared to change the plan. Have alternatives ready. Practice before presentations or visits so you are prepared. Include others but make sure spokespeople are credible, knowledgeable, and know your purpose.

RELATE what you believe to what they believe.

This is also called “singing their song.” Look at the mission, principles, plans, priorities, or criteria that decision-makers have published. This will give you a good idea about what they find important and compelling. Relate what you want to what they find important and compelling. If they have “buzzwords,” use them. Be aware of using acronyms or specialist vocabulary that is not familiar to them. Tell or who them how your program or service helps them accomplish their goals. Find common ground.

BUILD relationships, friendships, alliances.

Politics is the art of relationships. Look for allies and build alliances. Make friends. Don't think only in terms of the influence others have, but also in terms of the skills and experiences they can contribute. Think diversity. Find opportunities to be helpful and reach out. When you need help from allies and friends, ask for it. When lobbying, tactfully let your elected official know whose interests among his/her constituency you represent and who your allies are. Don't make enemies of your critics but find ways to “invite them into the tent” and let them participate in discussions about plans.

TIME your visits or contacts with elected officials carefully so they are most effective.

Don't just knock on the door the week before the budget is set. Find opportunities to meet when decision makers are not stressed, time is short, and there is a line at the door. Meet early and, if you can, meet regularly. Effective advocacy is not just a seasonal activity.

COVER all the bases.

Light many fires. Talk to potential opponents as well as supporters. Rather than preaching to the choir, aim to change minds and convert. Don't take past supporters for granted. Remember that the staffs of elected officials play a key role in shaping decisions, too and having an advocate on the staff can be very valuable. Decision makers also listen to spouses and friends. Also, let your stakeholders and contacts in the media know when there are new developments rather than assume they are following your progress.

BE OPEN

They say politics is the art of compromise and it is. Be flexible and willing to compromise, accommodate, and negotiate. Be ready to do so by discussing what you can and cannot give up or substitute before you are asked to. Help create win/win situations whenever possible. Remember that the willingness to agree to disagree is part of the American way of politics.

FOLLOW UP

If you have a request from an official for more information, supply it promptly. If they say they will do something, check to see they do it. Stay on top of the process and keep track. If you get backing or funding, be sure to let those who provided it

know how you spent their money, reached the goal, kept your promise, or if not, why not.

THANK officials, stakeholders, allies, the media...

Even when you don't get what you want, it is wise to thank an official for his/her time, consideration, etc. Acknowledge support, help, and attention both personally and, when appropriate, publicly.

DON'T demand, threaten, exaggerate, lie, whine, surprise, overwhelm, or waste time.

Use common sense. Elected officials are more likely to consider a courteous request or respond to a well-made case than give in to a demand for funds or service. No one likes being threatened or has a positive attitude towards someone who is threatening. Exaggerations and lies destroy credibility. Whining is not compelling, it's annoying. Although most people like to be surprised on their birthdays, surprises upset the planning process, allow less time and room to make changes, and can be stressful. Elected officials are already overwhelmed by information and have tight schedules, so get to the point and get out.